

THE CURATE'S CONSCIENCE

By Harold Carter

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Rev. Aloysius Brown was very busy as he stooped over his asters. They had come up splendidly from seed and he was wondering whether it was time to transplant them when he heard girls' voices upon the porch of his house.

"What a pity the new curate isn't in!" said one of them, Miss Margery Bowen, daughter of the wealthiest of his parishioners. "I did so want to get him on the new committee this morning."

"And I wanted to see him, too," said the other voice.

Rev. Aloysius was so struck by the quality of the tone that he peeped around the edge of the house, which was uncurately, but perhaps pardonable in a young man of 25. And when he had looked the curate did not repent in the least, for he saw the prettiest girl who had ever come within the range of his vision.

"Why, I thought you just came with me, Maud!" exclaimed Miss Bowen.

"Listen, dear," said the second girl, in whom the curate now recognized Miss Maud Anderson, the beauty of the village. "Mr. Friend, the rector, was telling mamma the other day that Mr. Brown is a very impressionable young man. And so I am determined to impress him. I haven't had a proposal this year, Margery."

"Oh, Maud!" exclaimed the other in awe. "You are never going to practice on the new curate! Leave the poor man alone!"

"It will do him good, Margery," answered Miss Anderson. "And I am working on a pair of slippers for him now, so you can see that my mind is fully made up."

Rev. Aloysius, overcome with shame, retreated hastily to the safe shelter of the tool house, from which he watched the girls depart down the street.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, and the curate resolved to anticipate Miss Anderson's intentions. Accordingly he set to work to countertermine the enemy's approaches.

The popularity of the new curate was soon assured. All the girls of Freeport vied with each other for his company, but it was soon obvious that Miss Anderson and the curate were devoted to one another. In fact, had the curate not been so obviously simple-minded, the situation would



Watched the Girls Depart Down the Street

have become scandalous. They were seen walking together, and once the curate drove Miss Anderson to the church committee meeting.

Rev. Aloysius, always on his guard, felt, nevertheless, that if he had not been warned so providentially he would have fallen a victim. Miss Anderson was a girl of character and mind, as well as of beauty. Finally, he began to realize that he had almost fallen into the trap that had been laid for him.